

The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7764 19 February 2011

Hope springs

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The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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The Inquirer is the oldest
Nonconformist religious newspaper

**"To promote a free and inquiring
religion through the worship of
God and the celebration of life; the
service of humanity and respect for
all creation; and the upholding of the
liberal Christian tradition."**

*From the Object passed at the
General Assembly of the Unitarian and
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Inquiring Words

Tilt the scales, O God of the mustard seed:
That the poor shall see justice.
Share the feast, O God of Eden's abundant garden:
That each crop may fetch a fair price.
Upset the tables, O God of the upside-down Kingdom:
That the least can benefit from their trade.
Open our eyes, O God of life in all its fullness:
That we may learn to walk the way of your son
tilting, sharing, upsetting this world
Not satisfied until the products we bring to our table
Give a better deal, to all who hunger for one. In God's name, Amen.

— A Fair Trade Foundation prayer for Fair Trade Fortnight, 28 Feb – 13 March

Keep the conversation going

The past fortnight has brought in several reactions to articles which recently appeared in *The Inquirer*.

Sue Woolley's story – ('Should Unitarians get happy?') on the cover of the 5 February issue – asked if we Unitarians might find ways to encourage more emotional involvement in our services. The idea occurred to Sue after she attended a Baptist service led by a friend.

She said:

We should be shouting this message from the rooftops, proclaiming the good news that here is somewhere that you can bring your whole self, doubts, uncertainties and all, and be cherished as a member of a like-minded community ... And I'm going to preach that the Unitarian message is one of joy and hope – and that can lead to spiritual rebirth as part of a loving, living community.

Two responses to Sue's ideas came in almost immediately and they appear on page 8. They can be boiled down to, 'yes please' and 'no thank you'. But I am intrigued with Sue's ideas.

So if there are practices or particular services that have helped you to make an emotional and spiritual connection, please write about the experience and send it in. (Obviously, congregations can continue to say, 'no thank you'.)

Another article which prompted some reaction was the Rev Chris Wilson's column on the Prime Minister's plans for the economy. ('We are obliged to speak out', *Inquirer*, 22 January) He says:

Should clergy ever make statements or comments about institutional injustice or political wrong-doing? Our Gospel is social as well as personal. I think we do have a responsibility to speak out. But real care is needed, lest by speaking, we cause unnecessary division.

Chris went on to share his concerns about the government's plans to reduce support for poorer people. One letter writer disagreed with some of what Chris had to say (see page 8) and worried that his views might be mistaken for the policy of the entire movement.

What do you think? Should Unitarian clergy be expected to keep their political views to themselves? Or should they continue in the tradition of Unitarian leaders who have spoken out against what they saw as the injustices of their day? Or, is it somewhere in between. Should our leaders be encouraged to speak to us from the pulpit, but then keep quiet about their views in the larger world?

I think this is a discussion worth having. Please send in your views.

GA Chief Officer Derek McAuley also had a response to Chris Wilson's column. He wrote a piece which appears in this issue (see page 6) about just where Unitarians may fit in to the 'Big Society'.

And the Rev Hilton Birtles was moved to write and ask what we Unitarians are doing beyond remembering the Holocaust. What must we do to prevent war and genocide?

How we worship; how we express ourselves in the larger world. These are important ideas to discuss. Let's keep the conversation going.

— MC Burns

Hope is stronger than optimism

By Doug Muder

We are entering the difficult part of the year. It is not the darkest time; the days have already gotten noticeably longer since the Solstice. But winter is not a new baby any more, and its adorableness is wearing off.

Every year, the first snow is miraculous, the second one pretty, and events go downhill from there.

It is difficult to be hopeful when you get into February. The reality is that winter will leave when it is ready. Possibly that is the origin of strange superstitions like Groundhog Day, which I interpret as a form of bargaining: Give me a chance that winter might be over immediately, and then maybe (if I lose) I might accept it going on for six more weeks.

This year I am running into many people who find hope hard to come by. Not all of them live in northern climates, and winter is not the only challenge that has outlasted the initial rush of adrenalin and determination.

Some have been looking for jobs and not finding them. Some are waiting for loved ones to come home – permanently, without ever needing to go back – from the wars in Afghanistan or Iraq. Some are wondering what will happen next, as retirement approaches and their preparations have not worked out.

Many are facing personal stresses that know no season: failed relationships and divorce, illnesses that may or may not be curable, children whose disabilities can be managed (with great effort and expense) but not set right, parents whose decline requires ever more intervention and care.

The world too faces seemingly insuperable challenges: Just as half the world starts reaching for a Western way of life, oil production is peaking; and even if more fossil fuels can be found, burning them threatens to bring cataclysmic changes to the climate and the biosphere. The antibiotic miracle seems to be unravelling, as growing bacterial resistance points towards a new age of global plagues. Modernity's promise of ever increasing reasonability and rationality also is unravelling, as a counter-revolution of fundamentalism rises in all its many forms.

At times like these it is important to remember the difference between hope and optimism. Optimism is an expectation of the future, but hope is a way of experiencing the present. Optimism assures us that the oasis we see in the distance is not a mirage, but hope simply inspires us to keep going. Optimism promises specific outcomes, but hope just says that striving is worthwhile, that whether or not good things will happen, creating opportunity is a good thing in itself.

Optimism often lies, but hope never fails. Optimism argues with the predictions of cynicism and bitterness, and is often proved wrong. Hope rejects cynicism and bitterness as unhelpful, and is perennially proved right.

Hope cares for the eggs without counting the chickens that might come from them. Hope plants as wisely as it can, knowing that the rains and the harvest are uncertain. Hope is—right



Photo by Andrea Kratzenberg

here and right now, whatever may happen in the future—a better way to live.

Hope is itself a challenging issue for Unitarians because historically we have been an optimistic religion. We are a can-do people. We make plans and project outcomes. Sometimes we have looked down our noses at faiths that keep hope alive through prayer and praise rather than goal-directed action. In good times, when plans succeed and goals are achieved, our way is clearly better. But in hard times, when the challenge is to endure rather than thrive, our advantages are less obvious.

Too often the 19th-century Unitarian faith in “the progress of mankind, onward and upward forever” has been taken as a guarantee of improvement day-by-day and year-by-year, when history instead shows long detours and backtracks. The arc of the moral universe may “bend towards justice” (as the Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr said it did), but not smoothly.

And yet, if we read our Unitarian prophets more closely, they did not promise that it would. King was echoing the 1853 sermon “Of Justice and Conscience” by Theodore Parker: “I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.”

I read that much more as a statement of Parker’s hopeful faith than his optimistic assurance. Parker was speaking in a time of slavery, in a country soon to fight a devastating civil war. Optimism would have been foolish; no one could predict when or how the crisis would resolve. But even without a vision of the goal or the path, it was important to keep going.

To the extent that we hang our hopes on specific future events, we may well be disappointed. The application is rejected, the cure fails, the contest is lost, the bill does not pass, the experiment proves nothing, and the can’t-miss investment does, in fact, miss. Sometimes entire civilizations collapse and take centuries to recover. It has happened and someday it will happen again.

And yet, history has a way of frustrating the pessimists as well, even when their position seems unassailable. Slavery ends. Jim Crow ends. Nazism is conquered. The Soviet Union falls. Read *Bleak House* or *Les Misérables* and then imagine taking Charles Dickens or Victor Hugo on a tour of the modern welfare states of the United Kingdom or France. How, given the rock-solid foundations of the vested interests of their day, could such a thing have happened? Even Thomas Carlyle, a philosopher never described as an optimist, had to admit: “No lie can live forever.”

The onward and upward progress of humanity does not happen by clockwork, and yet it happens. Even in the best of times, the daily headlines do not march steadily and inexorably towards goodness. If you pick out a period of history that seems particularly glorious from our perspective – the Golden

(Continued on next page)

Do more than just 'remember'

By Hilton Birtles

Following his visit to Birkenau, Adrian Clarke, makes a moving plea, (*Inquirer*, 5 February), that we should never forget the Holocaust for 'it was truly a hell on earth'.

In 1946, under the auspices of the International Student Service, I was the British student, who along with individual students from 21 other countries, visited Europe to try to identify the post-war needs of students. Among places we visited was Lidice, a village near Prague. Following the assassination of Heydrich, the Nazis ordered the murder of all males in the village, that all females and children be sent to concentration camps, and that the village be razed to the ground. Lidice became the byword of Nazi cruelty towards subject peoples. Truly a hell on earth, 'which we should never forget'.

Do you remember it? Have you ever even heard of it?

Since I retired in 1984, I have been the Honorary Chaplain to the North Russia Club, the Russian Convoy Club and the Flower Class Corvette Association, having served as a Navigating Officer in Corvettes, in the North and South Atlantic, the Indian Ocean and the Arctic. I have conducted hundreds of services in which we all said together, 'We will remember them'.

What have I remembered? Shipmates, friends from school, the Fellowship of Youth, members of my church, those killed or drowned in attacks on convoys, the millions on all sides unknown to me, but every one a person. I have remembered that the Holocaust and Lidice were horrific examples of a policy made wicked by politicians. I have remembered that these murderous events were carried out by fellow human beings. I have remembered the wicked pointless waste of it all. And yet, at the time, I felt I had to do something to combat this evil. Adrian makes a distinction between the murderous acts of the Holocaust and an army waging war. In a way, that is what happened to me. Horrific reports from Europe told of what the Nazis were doing to individuals and groups in the countries they had occupied and in their own homeland. My response was to join the Royal Navy.

Now in my 90th year, I have a strong feeling that it is not enough 'not to forget' or 'to remember'. There would not be much point in my grandchildren 'remembering' something



Hilton Birtles leaves his nursing home 'to remember' with Bangor Unitarians, November 2010.

they never knew, unless we, who do still remember, do something about it now.

What do I mean? I mean that we all know of murderous acts being carried out daily on innocent victims. These are the actions of closed-minded religious or political fanatics. The danger is that at some point taking into account Adrian's distinction, this might descend into a wider conflict and yet another war.

So let us not forget. Let us remember and let us do something about it.

Do what? I wish I knew. Can we as Unitarians, face up to the question? Our Unitarian historians tell us that our congregations have been characterised for over three centuries by freedom, reason and tolerance. How do we respond to the challenge of daily murder, terrorist acts carried out by religious and political fanatics? How far do we tolerate the intolerable? It is an old question. I have been here before.

I see that the GA meetings at Swansea are 'far more than a business meeting'. Have we got the courage to go so far as to recognise what is happening in terms of terrorist activity, and to see what, if anything, we can do about it? Before it is too late.

The Rev Hilton Birtles is a retired Unitarian minister living in a nursing home in Bangor, Wales.

Hope knows that seeds will sprout

(Continued from previous page)

Age of Greece, the Renaissance, the founding of the American Republic – you will almost always find that the local commentary was pessimistic. Whatever is big enough to be obvious is probably already in decline, and whatever is rising seems negligible by comparison. In every era, the doomed dinosaurs are more eye-catching than the evolving mammals.

Consequently, if you ask me about some specific issue, on any scale from the personal to the global, I may well be a pessimist. And yet I have hope. I keep striving. I keep planting the seeds of good things to come. Which ones will sprout and grow? I have no idea. Will any? Maybe not. But I choose to plant. It is a good way to live.

The first of February was the holiday the Celts call Imbolc,

which literally means "in the belly." It was the time of year when the ewes were said to begin lactating in anticipation of the spring lambs. Like the lambs in the wombs, the seeds that had fallen during the fall harvest were also in the belly of the Earth, waiting.

I look out my window, I can see no sign of those seeds. They are buried under the snow. I can only imagine them. There is no sign of them. We can only imagine that they must be down there, and anticipate that some will sprout and grow.

Maybe soon, maybe not. Someday.

*Doug Muder is a Unitarian writer who lives in New Hampshire in the US. This column first appeared in the *UU World*.*

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From the GA

Key Messages

Executive Committee - Jan 11

1. General Assembly Vice President

The Executive Committee is pleased to announce that Lis Dyson-Jones will be nominated as Vice President of the General Assembly (GA) for the year 2011/12 leading to the position of President in 2012/13. Lis was nominated by the East Cheshire Union of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, Cardiff Unitarians, South East Wales Unitarian Society, Manchester District Association of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, Merseyside and District Missionary Association and Golders Green Unitarians.

2. Future of Commission and Panel Structure

The Executive Committee has identified three strategic priorities: Ministry, Local Leadership and Visibility; and following the consultation at their previous meeting has reviewed the current structure of Commissions and Panels. They have concluded that current structures will not effectively deliver the new priorities. This will mean seeking to align the structures to the three strategic priorities with a target date of 1 October 2011 for implementation of any changes. The remainder of this financial year will therefore be a transition period with current work plans to continue.

3. Annual Accounts

The Annual Accounts of the GA and the Nightingale Centre were approved and those of the Sustentation Fund noted. A consolidated statement has also been produced which shows that the total resources for which the GA is responsible are over £5 million.

4. Constitutional Review Group

It was agreed that advertisements for members of the Constitutional Review Group will be placed in the next few weeks in preparation for a workshop at the Annual Meetings.

Volunteer Opportunities

Serving the Denomination in a voluntary capacity is not only rewarding but can be a way of developing new skills. In the interests of transparency and openness, the Executive Committee are advertising the following volunteer opportunities:

Co-option of GA Executive Committee Member

The Executive Committee is seeking applications for a co-opted member to fill the vacant position that arises following the election process last year. The co-opted member will serve from 17 April 2011 until the close of the Annual Meetings in 2013. The same criteria as apply to the election nomination process will apply.

Applications are sought from Full, Honorary and Associate Members of the GA and quota-paying members of constituent congregations. Skills and knowledge required are in the areas of:

- Leadership
- Strategy development
- Communications
- Decision making
- Representation
- Financial awareness
- Team working

Confidentiality, where necessary, about Executive Committee business is a general requirement.

In addition candidates should:

- Demonstrate 3 years active commitment to the Unitarian community
- Be in sympathy with the Objects of the GA

They should not be:

- A student in training for the Unitarian ministry
- A close family member of anyone employed by the GA

Constitution Review Group

The Executive Committee is seeking members to serve on a Constitution Review Group which has been established to bring forward proposals for Constitutional change at the 2012 Annual Meeting. The Terms of Reference for the Constitutional Group will be:

1. Executive Committee Elections:
 - a. the electoral process, including timing
 - b. terms of office
 - c. frequency of elections.
2. The roles of the President and the Vice-President
3. Procedure for the consideration of the awarding of Honorary Membership of the GA

Members should preferably have knowledge and experience of charity governance, the management of elections, of the work of the GA and of the operation of committees. Report writing skills are also an advantage.

Applicants for the above should submit a cv to Derek McAuley, GA Chief Officer, at dmcauley@unitarian.org.uk setting out how their experience and skills are relevant to the post. Applications must be received by 1 March 2011 to enable consideration by the Executive Committee at their meeting on 4/5 March 2011. For further information please contact Derek McAuley on 020 7240 2384.

Sustentation Fund

There is a vacancy for two Trustees who are appointed by the GA Executive Committee. The Fund meets once a year and provides financial grants to congregations to support Ministry. It also manages the Lay Pastors Fund. Last year nearly £23,000 was distributed to congregations.

The Retired Ministers' and Widows Fund

This is not the more well known Unitarian Fund but a benevolent fund of the Protestant Dissenting Denominations (now includes Unitarian and Free Christian, Congregational, URC and Baptists) founded in 1733.

Total grants made per year are £28,000. There is a vacancy for one of the four Unitarian trustees; the others being Revd Ashley Hills, Revd James McClelland and Dr Jane Williams). The role of the trustees is the overall management of the charity. Financial and/or pastoral experience would be useful.

Anyone interested in the Sustentation Fund or the Retired Ministers' and Widows Fund should contact Derek McAuley, GA Chief Officer at dmcauley@unitarian.org.uk.

Unitarians and the 'big society'

By Derek McAuley

The new Coalition Government has made the promotion of the 'Big Society' one of its key planks of policy. To most people the phrase was, and remains, unclear although the idea is now taking structural form in terms of practical proposals, such as volunteering and the National Citizen's Service and a future Big Society Bank. Faith groups are seen by Government as important players in the 'Big Society'. I therefore think that Unitarians should have something to contribute to its development.

What does the 'Big Society' mean? It is an intriguing phrase. In my less charitable moments (to think out loud) I wonder if its development in Opposition by David Cameron was a direct response to that comment of his Tory predecessor, Margaret Thatcher, that 'there is no such thing as society'. To an extent, she has been unfairly represented; what she said in that famous Woman's Own interview in 1987 was that individuals should take responsibility for their actions, and not cast their problems on society, for example, 'If children have a problem, it is society that is at fault'. It did, however, come to symbolise the rampant individualism of the 1980's which Cameron has sought to distance himself from.

The 'Big Society' seems to mean that local communities should develop their own solutions to local problems rather than rely upon Westminster. The Prime Minister said in a speech in Liverpool on 19 May 2010:

'... frankly, for decades, you've had politicians sitting round this table, making decisions, telling us all what to do, issuing orders and instructions and passing laws and regulations; and, actually, I profoundly believe that if we want real social change – if we want to solve our deepest social problems, whether it's drug abuse, whether it's problems of poor housing, whether it's problems of deep and entrenched poverty, whether it's the problem of children in care – it's going to be the voluntary sector, social enterprises...'

This, of course, implies that local communities have the capacity to self organise and develop services. Some will be able to do so as they already have a vigorous local civil society; community groups, environmental groups, sports clubs etc. Other areas, particularly in the inner cities and outer council estates, have few organisations and a smaller group of activists. They may struggle to compete for scarce Government and other resources and there is a danger that the poor will get poorer.

The churches are often the only institution remaining in some of these areas which are able to provide a range of social and support services outside of state control. They also have large under-used buildings in good central locations. The Government recognises this and has been promoting involvement with an open-door policy. The Anglican Bishops have responded positively although the Bishop of Leicester has made it clear that whilst the faith groups 'stand ready to co-operate and play our part but we will not collude in government neglect' (*The Guardian Weekly*, 7 January). Other Christians are more wary. A group called Common Wealth Network has said



Derek McAuley

'The Big Society is a Big Lie. It is a smoke-screen, another ideological veil. Its pretence of radical change is simply a means of persuading us to live in submission to the great God Capital'.

At a recent meeting of the ACEVO Faith Special Interest Group, which I chaired, Government Minister Andrew Stunell was challenged by those working in frontline faith-based organisations (FBOs). They presented evidence that cuts and reductions in national and local government spending will impact adversely on the most marginalised sections of our community; the poor, travellers and asylum-seekers. It was pointed out that if statutory services are further squeezed it should not be taken for granted that the Churches and other voluntary agencies could pick up the pieces. It is also stressed that volunteers are not 'free'; to be truly effective they need professional support.

Unitarians should respond sympathetically to the 'Big Society' theme although we may feel uncomfortable with the tag. Instinctively, I feel we don't like 'Big' anything; 'Big Government', 'Big Church', 'Big Bank'. To echo the words of EF Schumacher, 'Small is Beautiful'.

In 1962 a Report of the Social Services Department for the General Assembly opens with the sentence, 'A concern for social service has been always a marked feature of the Unitarian witness'. It then pointed out that in the 19th century that Unitarians in many places took the lead in seeking to improve the conditions under which the mass of the people both lived and worked. Their names still resonate down to us today; Florence Nightingale, John Fielden, John Pounds, Mary Carpenter and William Rathbone.

The inquiry concluded that a 'movement whose religious beliefs are rooted in a liberal approach to spiritual and moral values should inevitably produce a social philosophy in which practice takes precedence over precept'.

They thought that the emergence of the Welfare State would not solve all social problems and there was still a role for voluntary efforts. Some congregations played an active role in social services. They found that many individual Unitarians were making a valuable contribution to public life and social work.

Tony Rees carried out a similar survey in 2004. His report 'Unitarian Social Action at Work' (a robust piece of work well worth consideration and should be better known) found many similar trends. Congregation involvement and performance in social action was patchy – no doubt due to the lack of capacity. Youth work seems to have almost completely disappeared since 1962. As volunteers, Unitarians continue to participate to the full in local community life.

What theological thinking should underpin our approach to the 'Big Society'? The Unitarian-Universalist theologian, James Luther Adams, provides a valuable insight into these issues as he wrote widely on the meaning and importance of voluntary associations. He saw the free church as the historical model for the development of voluntary organisations in western societies. Just as the free church was outside of state control; so too voluntary associations, and there needed to be

(Continued on page 9)

Pretoria Pit disaster remembered



Folk band 'Turnpike' played at the commemoration service. (Right) The Rev JJ Wright wrote to *The Inquirer*. (Top right) Coal and a miner's lamp reminded those present of the loss.

One hundred years ago readers of *The Inquirer* rallied to raise funds following the worst pit disaster in Lancashire.

On the morning of 21 December 1910, almost 900 miners employed by the Hulton Colliery Company clocked on for the morning shift as their families prepared for the Christmas holidays. At 7.50am a huge underground explosion occurred at the Pretoria Pit on the border of Westhoughton and Atherton, claiming the lives of 344 men and boys, some just 13 years old.

Most of those killed were from Westhoughton, but families from surrounding areas including Atherton also lost loved ones and the Rev JJ Wright, then Minister at Atherton's Chowbent Chapel, appealed to *The Inquirer* for financial aid to help the

bereaved families of the township until the major relief fund could be organised. The response was overwhelming.

Chowbent Chapel held a special service in December to mark the Centenary – 'Pretoria Remembered'. There were many visitors to the service including the Bolton West MP Julie Hilling.

Westhoughton author Andrea Finney read from her recent book *344 – A Story of the Pretoria Pit Disaster (Inspired by a Mother's Tale)*. Her book was based on the diaries of Andrea's great-great-grandmother Elizabeth Gore whose son died in the explosion, and tells of the effect on a community where life was already a struggle for many.

Local folk band Turnpike sang and Turnpike member John Readett, Chair-



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A Journal of Liberal Religion

IN a letter received from Mr. Wright, he says: "My co-workers and I, here on the spot, are busy doing all we can in the homes of the sufferers, especially for the widows and orphans. We have sad, sad cases to deal with, where there are many little children, but I wish I could convey to subscribers something of the gratitude these orphaned children and widowed women show for the real and immediate help we have been able to render by the means put into our hands. It would repay the donors, as it amply repays us."

man of the Chowbent Congregation, sang his own composition '344 (Was a Christmas ever like this before?)'

During the service we remembered those who lost their lives and also remembered the courage of those who with no thought for their own safety carried out the rescue work. It was a moving and dignified occasion with uplifting moments such as the closing music of the service – a rousing rendition of "The Pitman" from a recording by The Wingates Band.

As people left the chapel to gather in the hall after the service, poignant reminders of this act of remembrance remained on the communion table surrounding the chalice – coal and miners' lamps.

– Brenda Catherall

Excerpt of the Rev Brenda Catherall's address.

I grew up in a mining family. My late father was a miner in the local pits for 46 years. He grew up in Gin Pit Village and though he moved to Atherton when he married, his brother and sister still lived at the terraced house in Gin Pit.

I remember as a little girl the Miners Galas. And I remember the processions with the banners and the brass bands playing and I also remember being keen to get to the ice cream van, but first having to listen to what seemed a very long speech from what I thought was a boring man in a gannex mack and smoking a pipe! Years later of course I realised it had been Harold Wilson.

Happy memories, but there were sad times too. In 1979 I remember vividly standing outside Golborne Parish Church as the memorial service was relayed for the 10 miners who lost their lives in the Golborne Pit Disaster.

I was a young journalist covering the events of the tragedy. But that day I stood hand in hand with my Dad as he mourned the loss of colleagues he worked with at Golborne Colliery ... Most of the pits in the UK are long gone along with the facto-

ries and mills of the same era. Yet mining remains a hazardous occupation. The Chilean miners were thankfully rescued from their enforced stay for many days in their dark prison, but the 29 New Zealand miners lost their lives recently, reminding us that the dangers faced in 1910 are still very real.

Families were left devastated as Christmas approached, and societies and organisations affected with the loss of members such as the local sports clubs and Wingates Band which lost seven of its members. But in the midst of immense sorrow a defiant spirit moved. The spirit that would see the Band play on with muffled drum at the funerals and memorial services. The spirit that would see others give what little they had to help their neighbours.

I believe one of the greatest tributes we can make to those miners is to work hard to create and to preserve loving, caring communities. To foster a community spirit which with the love of God will hold us close and sustain us in the good times and the bad, in joy and sorrow, that future generations may have life and have it more abundantly.

The Rev Brenda Catherall is minister at Chowbent.

Letters to the Editor

Take care when speaking on issues

To the Editor:

Chris Wilson is quite right in his article (*The Inquirer*, 22 January) that we do have a responsibility to speak out, and a serious discussion about these issues is healthy and desirable. However, the difficulty is the *capacity* in which we speak. As a private individual, you speak for yourself, unless you say otherwise. As a minister, that luxury is not open to you, and you therefore have to be a lot more considered in your approach. As we have seen recently, private comments can become public knowledge and it would be unfortunate if such comments were to be taken as representative of the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement.

To suggest that a particular issue could represent a social injustice and to promote discussion about it is, I believe, totally correct and appropriate. When comments start to support particular political ideals and indeed political solutions, we have crossed over a significant boundary and that carries considerable danger in alienating people we purport to represent, even if that representation is unintentional. The press is littered with people claiming to be misunderstood. So, I would say to Chris Wilson, in a private capacity of course, I share your concerns about the national financial situation and the impact of the proposed changes on the poorest members of our society who are less able to cope than most. I do not share your political views, for example, on VAT or further education. I'm not saying you are wrong and I am right – I'm just saying that there are many different ways to solve these problems. You have one view and I, and many others, have a different view – many different views. None of these views should be seen as representing a Unitarian and Free Christian point of view.

If we are to speak out in public and purport to represent the Unitarian and Free Christian community, intentionally or unintentionally, I believe we must be very careful to limit ourselves to highlighting the problems, not providing political solutions.

Robert Ince

Fulwood Old Chapel, Sheffield

Don't be shy, be joyful

To the Editor:

I tend to agree with Sue Woolley's contention in her *Inquirer* article of 5 February that joy and spontaneity sometimes seem to be missing in our Unitarian services. I wonder if this is because we are so anxious to be rational that we dismiss the Divine when it is there for our guidance and benefit. Perhaps we have built a brick wall around our emotions in order not to suffer what Richard Dawkins refers to as "a disease of the mind". Maybe we need to knock out a brick or two to make windows we can peer out of and observe that 'God' does indeed 'work in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform.'

A small child will jump up and down spontaneously on being given a surprise present, and I too, as an adult feel moved on occasions to give heartfelt thanks. Inspiring music causes me to raise my voice in song. It's the same inner feeling of awe we have on encountering majestic scenery or a very new baby.

So why not celebrate it, open our mouths, forget shyness or 'correct' behaviour, and be joyful!

I do not feel that the things of God happen by total accident so I guess we can expect to see Sue Woolley breathe new life into some Unitarian services.

Kathy Beckett

Edmund Kell Unitarian church,
Southampton

Don't emulate Baptists, please

To the Editor:

I was interested to read in the last edition of *The Inquirer* Sue Woolley's account of her recent visit to a Baptist church, from which she felt we had much to learn. I'm not so sure, myself! I'm all for a few laughs in the service, some guitar playing, PowerPoint projection of hymns on a screens, greater involvement of the congregation in the service, but her suggestion there is little joy in Unitarian services these days is, I think, simply not correct. I suppose it's how you interpret 'joy'. To me it's a quiet pleasure, a feeling of happiness and contentment, not a self-induced state of euphoria, and it is

this quieter feeling I get very frequently when leaving our church on a Sunday. I wouldn't want to change all that for a happy-clappy atmosphere when I have to see those raised arms and hear the cries of 'Praise Jesus' – no, not for anything!

I grew up with a Baptist background, was totally immersed at the age of 17 in a church in South Wales that was very traditional in its approach to worship: no clapping, waving of arms or shouting out, just a good old sermon and four well-known hymns sung with some passion. I was able to take it then and might very well have continued in this vein, had I not visited a Baptist church in a different part of the country, to which I had moved, where the service was quite different.

Some years ago I attended a baptismal service in this church where one of my pupils at the time was being baptised. It was frightening! There were people dancing in the aisles, crying out, and some were even rolling around on the floor, speaking, so I understand, in tongues. I couldn't get out of the building quickly enough and have never visited a Baptist church since. Thank heavens I came across Unitarianism in the meantime and have found a home and a type of open religion that suits me perfectly.

Of course, its horses for courses, or 'chacun à son goût', as the French say, but the day my Unitarian church adopts the pattern of worship of these charismatic churches, I'm off!

Graham Williams

New Meeting Unitarian Church
Kidderminster

UK should review extradition policy

To the Editor:

I am distressed at the lack of comment, both in your columns and elsewhere, on the recently published memoirs of ex-US President George W Bush, in which he appears to have expressed approval of physical torture.

Can the United Kingdom go on extraditing any kind of suspect to the country which twice elected this man as its leader?

Dr Michael Topham

Rochester

Minister inducted by 2 congregations

By Aled Jones

The ministry of Danny Crosby at the Altrincham and Urmston congregations began on Sunday 1 August. The first induction service took place at Dunham Road Unitarian Chapel on Saturday 6 November. The congregation was extremely gratified at the support shown to Danny both by fellow Unitarians from the north west and in particular by the Manchester District Association. The chapel was filled to overflowing and the service took place in the presence of GA President Neville Kenyon and the mayor and mayoress of the borough of Trafford.

The service was conducted by the Rev Jane Barraclough (Cross Street Chapel), assisted by the Rev Alex Bradley, principal of Unitarian College, Manchester, who gave the charge to the congregation. The Rev John Midgley addressed the minister.

The ceremony of induction was simple and sincere; Angela Fowler, chairperson of the congregation, outlined the responsibilities of the congregation and then chapel members stood and said 'We promise to join with you, Danny, in the celebration of our free religious faith; we will walk with you in the name of compassion for the sake of community.' Afterwards, Danny Crosby responded. To conclude, formal greetings were brought by Neville Kenyon from the GA and by representatives of Manchester District Association and the Unitarian



Queens Road Church Chairperson Derek Brown greets the Rev Danny Crosby

Ministerial Fellowship. It was a joyous occasion and the congregation look forward with optimism to the new ministry.

The Service of Welcome by the Queens Road Church congregation took place some months later, on Sunday 16 January, when the Rev Andrew Parker led the service assisted by the Rev Michael Dadson and the Rev Danny Crosby himself. Derek Brown, chairperson of the congregation, welcomed Danny on behalf of the church members who then stood and made their pledge to play their part in this partnership by supporting him at all times in his ministry. The address was given by the Rev Michael Dadson (Macclesfield) based on the book *The Gilead: Looking Back on a Life of Ministry* and greetings from the General Assembly were given by GA President Neville Kenyon.

There were ample opportunities to meet and talk with friends afterwards, over refreshments in the schoolroom. This was certainly a happy occasion and gave Chairperson Derek Brown an opportunity to welcome Danny, not just as a new minister but – after five months' association with the church – as a friend and part of the Queens Road Church family.

— Aled Jones is a member of the Dunham Road Unitarian Chapel.



The Rev Danny Crosby at Dunham Road Church with the Rev Alex Bradley, GA President Neville Kenyon and the Rev John Midgley

A Unitarian approach to the 'Great Society'

(Continued from page 6)

a deliberate and carefully preserved limitation on Government power. He saw participation in voluntary associations as the chief means by which beneficial social change had been effected throughout history.

As Unitarian Universalist Association study material states 'As a theologian, Adams was interested in voluntary associations because his experience and studies had brought him to the belief that through voluntary participation in groups humanity may respond in all times to 'the community-forming' power of God's love, present in and available to every human heart and mind'. Adams expected that every Unitarian should lead by example and participate in at least one voluntary association and all his life he was active in social and civil rights activity. He was not just an academic but an activist.

Therefore, in practical terms, I would suggest that all Unitarians should reflect on the social implications of their own

personal beliefs which I hope should drive them to consider their own community involvement both individually and collectively. Let us build upon our traditions of social involvement. Churches and Chapels should look to see how far they are embedded in their local community and ask themselves do they know what problems are faced by local people and if they can help. Many do this already as I see when I read Newsletters and talk to people.

Even if numbers are small we can always do something. There is ample scope to work with other agencies and other faith groups to build the 'Big Society' from the bottom up as we know that Government won't be able to do it. This is not a substitute for action on wider issues of policy, as highlighted by the Rev Chris Wilson in *The Inquirer* (22 January), but a human response to real needs. We can do no other.

Derek McAuley is chief officer of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.

Trevor Jones touched many lives

Trevor Howarth Jones

21 May 1932 – 11 January 2011

Trevor's father was the Unitarian minister in the town of Stockport. It was here that he was born on 21 May 1932. The family moved to Hindley where Trevor attended school and another move took him to Coventry where he took his 'A' levels. His time in National Service saw him as a medic in the RAF. With that over, he studied at Loughborough Teacher Training College and then went to Birmingham Art College.

It was during this time that he sought out Waverley Road Unitarian Church and met the Rev Ron McGraw. He was to be quite an influence and role model for Trevor who decided that he would train for the ministry. He studied at the Unitarian College in Manchester and served at Underbank Chapel, Stannington. He had married Sheila and it was here that Ruth and Cathie were born.

Trevor was busy doing – he was busy organising and he was busy influencing and it is this aspect of his life that we celebrate. There was a branch of the Unitarian Young People's League at Underbank – and young folk gathered, or rather crowded, into the cellar of the parsonage where Trevor and his family lived. The great Pennine Way walk was organised and there were many links with other Unitarian youth groups.

Trevor then moved to Wythenshawe. There was much to be done and it was a time when Trevor and Sheila did much writing and singing together. Trevor always had a natural ability to form relationships and friendships with people. He would laugh and chuckle his way through many activities – organised in his casual way. He had a great way of linking everybody and everything together using his fiddle, his guitar, his songs and his humour.

He inspired and he ignited. It was a time of the Folk Club, Friday gatherings on the stage – very well known and well attended in its time. Trevor was known as the 'Rocking Vicar' and the '60s were a-swinging. Trevor inspired and influenced many people – especially young people at this time. Trevor's way – always to be his way – was to see any difficulties not so much as a 'youth problem' but as an 'adult problem'. He was on the side of the young folk and they knew it. He worked with people – as their equal. When you were with Trevor you knew that you were respected and what you did was valued.

By now, baby Daniel had arrived and Trevor had become the minister at the Chorlton Church. He returned to teaching and became Head of Moral Education at Burnage High School. He then took up the post of Head of RE at Burley High. It was a very difficult time of social unrest in the Moss Side area of Manchester, and there was Trevor at the forefront of working with the local leaders on mediation and healing.



*Trevor Jones, painted by Adrian Worsfold.
Used with permission*

Then came the advert from Unitarian Headquarters for a Religious Education and Youth Officer. It was 1982 and Trevor held that post until he retired in 1997.

He travelled to the United States too. He searched for new RE and worship material and brought much back – cautious he was to ensure that it had a British feel. It was a time when literature and ideas from the US were looked upon with suspicion and prejudice. He was at the cutting edge of the idea that it is the process that matters and that activity is the vehicle for change. Trevor passionately believed that allowing people to grow and to change is important for development and growth.

Trevor started the annual RE Summer school in Great Hucklow, which continues today and has influenced hundreds of people. He brought about 'Religious Education Co-ordinators' to cover regions of this country. He

devised the programme Growing Unitarians, The President's Award Scheme, Awakenings. There were the courses and a book on Games Book to develop Group activity. There was Songs for Living, Unisongs, and a whole series of booklets for work with Juniors and Seniors.

Trevor devised the National Youth Programme – still in operation today – some would say our crowning glory. It is this transforming inspiration that Trevor will be remembered for and, for this, many will remember him and give thanks.

When Trevor didn't have a guitar or a glass or a fiddle or a fag in his hand I shall remember him with paper. Not official paperwork, for Trevor was not one who connected easily with officialdom. I shall recall the pieces of paper that in his hands became drawings, poems, songs, music or a sketchy outline of how a new idea was going to work.

There was one occasion when money was needed and Trevor announced he would get his son Daniel to ride a tandem with him from Land's End to John O'Groats. The thinking was simple – get people to sponsor, money raised – job done. I ended up as the driver so Daniel, Trevor and I met at my house to plan. I had a large map of Britain on the floor. I was ready for an intense evening of work to calculate how we would go and where we would stop each night. Trevor knelt down – held his thumb and little finger apart and walked his way up the map saying something like – 'Sunday, Monday Tuesday,' and so on. He sat back, rolled a cigarette – job done.

Retirement was not easy for Trevor. His missed his contacts and it would be true to say that these years became a time of decline. But he leaves us with much for he leaves many transformed souls.

– Taken from the eulogy given by the Rev David Shaw at Trevor Jones' memorial service.

Trevor is now forever 'Flying Free'

After a difficult decade of indifferent health and much depression Trevor Jones departed this life on 11 January. Despite the trials of his post-retirement years, Trevor is remembered with love and respect by the surviving generations of his family and a wide community of people from the Unitarian movement and beyond. This was manifest at his funeral at Southern Cemetery, Manchester, on 25 January and the subsequent celebration of his life held that evening at Great Hucklow.

Sheila, daughters Ruth and Cathie and son Daniel determined that the proceedings would reflect Trevor's nature and character. They wished the funeral service to be short and simple and to place the main emphasis on the evening celebration of his life. However, Trevor was borne to his final destination in a unique coffin manufactured by Daniel and artistically decorated by Ruth. It recorded the family names, his faithful VW Microbus 'Brutus', pen drawings of Great Hucklow and the slogan 'Flying Free'. Following the funeral, the family adjourned to Great Hucklow.

Old Chapel was packed with those of us who had been influenced by Trevor during his ministries and later career as the GA Religious Education and Youth Officer. How Trevor would have appreciated the quality of the hymn singing, the eulogies delivered by David Shaw, Ruth and Daniel and the music provided by Cathie, Sheila and Daniel. David Shaw was particularly well qualified to officiate at both services, having been an active leader of the Unitarian Youth Programme, and his address now forms the obituary (see previous page).

Afterwards, we repaired to the Nightingale Centre for refreshments, a brief barn dance in the car park around a glowing brazier and finally to the Queen Anne for folk singing, late into the night, led by Cathie. The occasion provided a great reunion of people from many facets of his life and the chance to exchange recollections of the man who was fundamental in initiating the RE and youth programmes that are such an important part of our denominational life today. Typical of such tributes are the following words of Ernest Baker:

'As a teen/early 20-something like so many of that Unitarian youth generation I was quite transfixed and transported by his seeming extraversion, cheeriness and musicianship. He was a guitar-toting 'star' and he played the fiddle too! His UYPL and Folk Club drew in Marion as a teenager looking for a congenial religious community to be part of, and we were thrilled when he got to help plan in detail and conduct our wedding ceremony, as he did for other UYPLers.'

David Warhurst recalled his years of collaboration with



*Trevor's hand-made coffin is brought into the crematorium.
Photo by John Hewerdine.*

Trevor in connection with the Presidents' Award Scheme and made the point that so many of its participants have gone on to do important jobs within the denomination. We certainly celebrated Trevor's life as he would have wished. The biggest tribute that we can pay him is to continue to encourage the youth and RE programmes that he so courageously created and championed. Those of us who knew and loved Trevor will always think of him whenever we sing 'Flying Free'.

– Compiled by Jeff Teagle with contributions from the Rev Ernest Baker, the Rev David Shaw, David Warhurst, and Sheila Jones.

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HARRIS MANCHESTER COLLEGE CONFERENCE: THE THEOLOGY OF SCARCITY AND ABUNDANCE

We are holding a Conference which, we hope, will appeal to all Ministers, Lay Pastors, Lay Leaders and Students for the Ministry from Monday June 27th to Wednesday, June 29th. (Monday at 4.00 p.m. until Wednesday lunch). The cost will be £130, plus a small conference fee of £10.

Our speakers will include The Very Reverend Mark Turnham Elvins, Franciscan Priest on The Theology and Practicalities of a Life of Poverty, John Naish, Unitarian, author of 'Enough' and a speaker from Church Action on Poverty will facilitate the final session on social justice work within our congregations. The Annual Service at the Conference will be conducted by the Rev. Alex Bradley, Principal of Unitarian College Manchester and minister of Styal Chapel.

We choose to meet when the College is holding its end of term proceedings, which will include the annual meeting of honorary Governors and Friends on Tuesday afternoon and the Valediction Service of our Oxford ministerial students. Please contact Jane Barracough, preferably by email at the address above if you would like to come, unless you are a member of MOSA in which case you will receive the booking forms as usual. The deadline for bookings to be received is the 1st June. We would like to see all those interested in the topic.

Jane Barracough
Secretary of Harris Manchester College Oxford
Ministerial Old Students' Association



A sing-song was led by Trevor's daughter Cathie at the Queen Anne pub in Great Hucklow. Photo by Hazel Warhurst

News in brief



In October, a service was held at The Great Meeting in Hinckley to mark World Mental Health Day. The Rev Chris Goacher gave an address highlighting the day-to-day life of those who suffer from mental ill-health and the discrimination and stigmatization that they endure, telling the congregation, 'Frightening as mental illness can appear, it doesn't remove a person's humanity; medication may help to give suffers some control of their lives but they cannot heal the social issues of rejection and stigmatization – only we can do that.'

Members of the congregation were encouraged to join the 'Time to Change' Campaign to end discrimination for the mentally ill. <http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/>

In autumn, West Leicestershire Mind was the chosen charity for The Great Meeting and it was with great pleasure that Mrs Margaret Horton, chairperson of the congregation, was able to make a presentation of £400, raised from Coffee Mornings etc, to Lynne and Teresa, representatives of West Leicestershire Mind.

– Chris Goacher

Worship Studies Course offered in summer

The Education and Training Commission Joined-up Education Panel announces that the next National Worship Studies Course Foundation Step 2011 course will be held in Manchester on four Saturdays in summer. Sessions are planned for 21 May, 4 and 18 June and 2 July from 10 am to 4.15pm. Bring your own lunch, drinks will be provided. All sessions will be at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester M2 1NL – except 4 June at Luther King House, Rusholme, Manchester, M14 5JP.

Registration is £5, then each session is £10. The total, £45.00, can be paid up front or at each session.

Leaders include the Rev Ernest Baker, Dawn Buckle, the Rev Bill Darlison, David Dawson, the Rev Dr Vernon Marshall, the Rev Gillian Peel, the Rev June Pettit and Sue Woolley. The course will cover the foundation step syllabus including: Worship is...?; Practicalities and Precautions; Prayer; Music in Worship; Speech and Communication; Addresses/Sermons/Talks; Finding and Choosing Readings; Storytelling and Children's Spot.

To gain the Worship Studies Course Foundation Step certificate, participants will need to complete two assessed services. Booking and more information from Dawn Buckle: e-mail: dawnbuckle@ymail.com; Tel: 01457 763 721

– Dawn Buckle

WCF sponsors 'Journey to Compassion'

World Congress of Faiths, the International Association for Religious Freedom and the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University warmly invites you to a 'Journey to Compa-

sion' retreat, 8-10 March at the Global Retreat Centre, near Oxford.

During this time of reflection there will be sessions on: *Compassion*, inspired by the Charter of Compassion (Tuesday 4.30 pm)

Forgiveness (Wednesday morning)

The Inner Journey (Wednesday 4.30 pm)

'A Heart for the World' - How do we show greater compassion in our life and in our work? (Thursday morning).

There were also be times for personal conversation, meditation and quietness as well as opportunities to enjoy the beautiful grounds of the Global Retreat Centre.

'Journey to Compassion' will be held at the Global Retreat Centre, Nuneham Park, Nuneham Courtenay, Oxon OX44 9PG. Arrivals are from 3.30pm on Tuesday 8 March with departures after lunch on Thursday 10 March. The Global Retreat Centre generously offers hospitality but your donations will be greatly appreciated. All meals are strictly vegetarian. There will be a 'market place' to share information about the organisations in which you are involved. Rather than a plenary session for presentations, we would provide table space for you to display some leaflets and answer questions and share what inspires you in your work. We hope also that we find encouragement from discovering the many ways in which people are striving for a more compassionate society.

Please reply to interfaith@uk.bkwsu.org if you will be able to join us. Places are limited so an early response is recommended.

– Richard Boeke

IARF plans annual meeting

The British Chapter of the International Association for Religious Freedom will hold its Annual Meeting at noon on Thursday, 12 May at Dr William's Library, 14 Gordon Square, London. The Rev Chris Hudson MBE, Minister of All Souls Church, Belfast, and Chair of Northern Ireland Chapter, IARF will speak following a bring-and-share lunch. The Rev Hudson is noted for work in the Peace Movement in Northern Ireland. For more information, Google 'Rev Chris Hudson' to see the video: 'The Reverend Chris Hudson, one of the leading negotiators & mediation experts of Northern Ireland.'

– Richard Boeke

Death Notice

DON, George Graham, beloved husband of the late ELIZABETH, died peacefully on 24th January 2011, two days before his 99th birthday. Father of Robert and Kathryn, father-in-law of George and grandfather of Joseph and Richard, he is deeply missed by all his family. Inquiries to Kathryn on 01908 677037

New Book Available

DIVINE DISCONTENT: Prayers of imperfect creatures in an imperfect world who nevertheless love that which is perfect and strive to live accordingly, struggling to make good lives out of harsh materials. By Dr HARRY LISMER SHORT, sometime Principal of Manchester College, Oxford. £3 incl. postage from F.Walker, 130 New Road, Haslingfield, Cambridge CB23 1LP